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ABSTRACT

Although tribal colleges were created to provide autonomy in higher education for American Indians, these colleges are dependent upon external sources for funds, personnel, and part of their legitimacy. Facing two sets of expectations, tribal-college administrators must manage problems experienced by their Indian clientele and adjust institutional routines to the cultural norms of Indian society while presenting the familiar appearance of a postsecondary educational institution to outside resource providers. Case studies of administration at Turtle Mountain Community College (North Dakota) and at Little Big Horn College (Montana) demonstrate the effects of funding dependencies on administrative and academic structures. As a consequence of funding dependencies, one site moved toward a more bureaucratized management system over time, while the other reported pressure to do so. Initially, administrators' professional credentials were crucial to the colleges' academic legitimacy. However, as the colleges gained institutional legitimacy, administrators' external roles as professionals became less salient than the bureaucratic structures they had established. Academic structuring showed an opposing trend, as expectations of 4-year transfer institutions forced a shift from informal flexible coursework taught by faculty with primarily bachelors degrees to a stable core of courses taught by faculty with advanced degrees. Despite the adoption of formal structures, however, day-to-day practices of both colleges continue to reflect the social patterns of Indian rather than mainstream society. (SV)

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Indian Colleges: A Means to Construct a Viable Indian Identity or A Capitulation to the Dominant Society?

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Introduction

After experiencing a century of federally directed education services aimed at assimilating individual American Indians into the mainstream U.S. society, in the late 1960's and throughout the 1970's many American Indian communities began to take charge of their own educational institutions. This generally took the form of replacing the boards and administrations of existing elementary and secondary schools with Indian members. Several American Indian communities also founded tribal colleges--an entirely new institutional form. Autonomy is the raison d'ètre of these colleges.

The relationship between American Indian colleges and their environments is problematic. Indian colleges are embedded in impoverished Indian communities that can supply few of the needed resources. They depend upon outside sources, drawing part of their legitimacy, as well as their funds and personnel from the external environment. Each of these dependencies leaves the colleges vulnerable to the discretion of the holders of those resources, reducing the capability of their administrators to control the internal processes of their organizations. Under such conditions Indian control of tribal colleges is likely to be limited and possibly with it the viability of the colleges in responding to the needs of the Indian community. This paper looks at the extent to which and the ways in which Indian colleges are influenced by external resource holders.

Indian colleges differ from traditional colleges in a number of ways. Their basic governance structure is different. They are officially chartered by the Indian group, tribe or band they serve; and they are governed by a board with a majority of Indian members. Indian colleges are small, enrolling an average of 183 full time equivalent students, a majority of whom are American Indian. Unlike the modal U.S. community college they are rural, rather than urban or suburban, typically located in villages of less than 2,000 people. They generally have an Indian chief executive, although their faculty usually is not Indian. They typically hire part-time instructors employed concurrently in other local organizations--high schools, government offices, hospitals and so on. Their students are older than the typical college student, often the parents of two or more children, and employed at least part-time. Many are high school dropouts who obtain through the college a high school equivalency diploma via the G.E.D. test prior to enrolling as freshmen. A significant number of students claim that they would not have chosen to attend college away from home (Duchene, 1982; Carnegie, 1989).

Perhaps because formal organizational features of Indian colleges emphasize Indian participation, little research has been done on other possible sources of continuing influence. Indian control has been <u>assumed</u>; the concomitant withdrawal of larger society dominance has been

assumed. Whether these assumptions are supported in the case of Indian colleges has not been studied. This paper addresses this issue.

Resource Dependencies of Indian Colleges

For Indian community colleges, legitimacy and funding dependencies are likely to lead them to use buffering and bridging strategies that together affect both administrative and academic structures. Indian colleges face two sets of expectations. They must interact as peers with other Indian organizations as well as with academic institutions in the larger society. Differences between these two environmental influences must be handled in ways that permit stability in the organization.[2] For example, administrators in Indian colleges must skillfully manage and flexibly meet the variety of problems experienced by their Indian clientele--family problems, poverty, low expectations for self and institution. They must adjust institutional routines to cultural norms of Indian society (Carnegie, 1989). At the same time, Indian colleges need to present the familiar, reassuring appearance of a postsecondary educational institution to the outside society which supplies or influences the supply of much of its resources. They must provide credentialed faculty, assign conventional names to courses, and follow other academic routines expected of colleges as academic institutions. The outcome of these possibly conflicting demands are likely to be found in the

administrative and academic structure.

Administrative structure

A strong research literature associates environmental conditions with administrative structures (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Hannaway, 1978; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Rowan, 1981; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983 and Scott and Meyer, 1984). Since the function of administrative structures is to balance and reconcile the demands of the environment with those of the organization (Scott, 1987) this relationship is not surprising. What is not quite so clear is how and why particular structural choices are made in relation to particular conditions in the environment, especially for educational institutions.

Indian college administrative structures need to withstand scrutiny by accreditation visiting teams which expect top college officials to hold graduate degrees. But the supply of credentialed Indian administrators is limited--and the holders are usually young. Moreover, traditional Indians associate wisdom with age and in order to maintain legitimacy in the local community the colleges are also challenged to meet these expectations. How these conflicting environmental interests are resolved can explain persistence of particular administrative features. For example, a nonprofessional Indian elder board member may informally advise a young Indian President on a nearly daily basis, while holding down a job such as an intake worker for

a social service program housed at the college (a co-opting process). Or, the local tribal council may apply pressure to hire a trusted Indian who has little formal education to serve as the college's Business Manager despite a funding agency's demand that the financial manager be professionally credentialed. In such situations, whether the college uses political connections to get the funding agency to drop the demand, or whether it strikes a bargain with the Council reveals how administrative structures arise from management of environmental influences.

Academic Structure

Researchers consider environmental conditions to be "loosely coupled" to academic practices (Weick, 1976; Meyer and Rowen, 1977). However, when there is tension between local goals and those of the larger society, the connections become more visible. What counts as useful knowledge may differ. The U.S. academic culture in universities is self-policing--the curricula are interactively determined by social networks of scholars (Gumport, 1988). In addition, the discipline-based institutional influences have a critical influence on curricular choices--including the processes used to implement such academic structures in universities (Alpert, 1985). The influence of disciplines on the academic structure of community colleges involves the transfer curriculum. Transfer of credits to four-year colleges may depend upon whether the Indian college uses

standard discipline-oriented courses and standard textbooks. At the same time, many local communities expect the college curriculum to focus on American Indian culture, especially that of the local tribe (Horse, 1982). Mathematics and science courses which stress individual academic competition in the larger society run counter to Indian norms which call for group study and cooperation (Carnegie, 1989).

Indian community colleges poised between high schools, four year colleges and Indian communities are likely to adopt academic structures to fit their students into the niches supplied by surrounding institutions. Programs building on the standard academic fare provided in high school, closely approximating what four year institutions in the state offer for the first two years would provide academic bridging. Moreover, vocational programming would need to focus on specialized job skills for immediate employment upon exit from the college. In such terminal programs, clock-hour prescriptions and competency levels for trainees set by state licensing bureaus and vocational funding sources are likely to dominate specific requirements for occupational certificates offered by Indian colleges. The specific fields selected are likely reflect probable job openings in the local area and state.

To manage these multiple demands the colleges employ highly credentialed non-Indian personnel to hold faculty positions, adopt conventional departmental structures, and

label courses with familiar names. These reassure others that the college implements standard practices that provide a bridge between the Indian college and majority society four-year institutions. At the same time, to accomodate Indian clientele, actual practices encouraged by the college may vary considerably from standard expectations. For example, an Indian college might enroll the majority of its students in vocational and Indian cultural courses, but emphasize its transfer curriculum in publications. One Indian college respondent cited accreditation concerns as critical in decisions about what courses his (Indian) community college would offer (Belgarde, 1989). With limited resources all demands may not be readily met. Tribal college structures arise to handle such interactive effects of environmental influences and preferences of organizational members.

Specific Effects at Two Tribal Colleges

At Turtle Mountain Community College, a tribal college in north central North Dakota, the administrators observe that TMCC becoming an accredited higher education institution has changed the way they are viewed by the State of North Dakota. Initially, TMCC experienced some resistance in obtaining cooperation from State institutions. Generally, the State higher education institutions viewed tribal colleges as an affront to the efficacy of their own organizations to serve the State's needs. In fact, they

insisted, in the early years, on maintaining some administrative control of TMCC's operations as a condition for recognizing credits earned at TMCC. TMCC's receipt of regional accreditation as an autonomous institution changed expectations and led the State in recent years to perceive value in maintaining a continuing presence at TMCC.

> In 1984, we were able to get federal funds back from the Native American and Hawaiian Vocational Education Act so we called the State [Vocational Education Director] to say that we wanted to terminate our program with them. But he insisted that he would like to continue to work with us, so we came up with the Single Parent Program to provide help to some of the women--and some men too--who had dependent children (Administrator, 1990).

> We have to be aware that we're part of this world, this state. There has to be some bridge with the state colleges, for example. You have to communicate with other colleges--we offer a two year program. The University of North Dakota or some other college has to accept our credits for the last two years [of a baccalaureate degree] (Governing board member, 1990).

At the same time TMCC has continually faced a critical tribal public which demands that the college display characteristics they have learned to associate with formal organizations. Tribal members also expect the college to display understanding, warmth and concern.

> I am on the Recruitment Committee. In everything I do [in the community] I talk up the college in public--like a businessmen, you have to emphasize the high value of the product [well-prepared student graduates] the College puts out. We use newspapers, brochures, radio, [departmental subject-related] promotional material, public presentations--Education Fair-type activities (Faculty member, 1990).

> Daily contacts by staff and faculty with other community members emphasizing positive things going on

at the college builds credibility in the College as an Indian organization. I have heard people refer to TMCC as "the Commodity College" [implying a welfare-type organization "giving away" credits]; and I have said, 'We are not that.' And I tell them about all of the things we are doing [well].

How we are looked at includes little things like how you handle talking to outside agencies. There's such a thing as telephone etiquette. I try to be pleasant, professional--show that [we] are reasonable, willing to work things out, be a partner in solving the problems between us and other agencies. [We are] sensitive to the charge that college business offices should pay more attention to students. TMCC's business office worked extra hours to make sure that students received financial aid checks as quickly as possible. I hope that we're projecting closeness to the human needs of our clients (Staff Member, 1990).

At Little Big Horn College on the Crow Indian Reservation of Southeastern Montana, the college staff and faculty took positive action in their curricular planning to reconcile the sometimes conflicting needs of academia and the tribe. Nevertheless local needs create crises.

We redefined what we saw in other catalogs. We decided that there were certain balances, Communication / English and the tribal language; a sense of social sciences within the tribal context--a sense of political science and history and humanities. We weren't going to afford humanities, social sciences and history outside that context unless we could. Our first priority was to put the General Education requirements into Tribal Studies...

We have tremendous vulnerabilities. We have to know everybody well to see what they can do to fill in. With people tied to the community, as 3/4 of us are, whatever is going on in the local community is going on here [in the College]. [Last year, there was a major local scandal--complete with 26 indictments and 9 convictions--many of the staff had relatives who were involved]...one trial after the other. This place was in mourning...in the middle of all the indictments, we were getting accredited! Formal accreditation came the same week that some trials ended, with convictions. Some thought our celebration [upon receiving notification that LBHC had been approved for full

> accreditation] on the lawn was an Anti-So-and-So Assembly! (Administrator, 1991)

However, the interaction goes both ways. Tribal college personnel also take an active role in shaping their environments as corporate citizens of their tribes. For example, the Little Big Horn College was in the forefront of a successful class action civil suit which found the state to be discriminating against Indians in voter apportionment for state elections.

> "I don't believe in neutrality. There are certain basic human rights that you can't be neutral on. When you see people being damaged every day..Hell, what is neutrality? You might as well be nothing!" (Administrator, 1991)

The effects of resource dependencies sometimes show up in the formal structure of the organizations. At Turtle Mountain, the primary source of funding for the college is the federal government. Over the past twenty years, two federal departments have provided the bulk of the College's funding: the Department of Education (ED) and the Department of the Interior (DIO). ED provides funding to the College in accordance with its status as a higher education institution. DIO provides funding to TMCC because it is an American Indian organization. The remainder of TMCC's funding derives from the State of North Dakota and from small private grants.

TMCC employees wrote grants for ED programs which varied from upgrading Student Services, to adding science curricular capability (MISIP). Aligned with Tolbert's

(1985) findings, such grant-writing was a routinized part of the expected roles of the regular occupants of the positions--rather than done by a separate "federal funding specialist." Further, TMCC re-structured the organization to establish a position exclusively devoted to development of funding from the private sector, thus creating a specialized role for a secondary (indeed almost nonexistent) funding resource.

Similarly, at Little Big Horn resource dependencies shape formal academic structures. Some subdivisions deliberately adopted curricular patterns identical to those of existing mainstream institutions in order to enhance the legitimacy of LBHC arrangements.

> I took one look..and said, 'MSU is the flagship institution in Science in this State, and our science department is going to reflect MSU." Because of that nobody questions our math or science credits here, ever. It also made it easier for me. I just looked at what they were doing and duplicated it, at first. Now, we've made some changes (Faculty member, 1991).

The decision to focus on curricula that easily transfers to four year institutions drives other departments to mimetic processes as well; however, the differing transfer destinations dictate that different set of courses be adopted. For example, General Studies and Crow Studies graduates tend to transfer to Eastern Montana College. Despite the fact that many of the Crow Studies courses were actually <u>developed at Eastern</u> by the LBHC faculty member when employed there, transfer is not automatic. The caveat

"subject to departmental approval" introduces a subjective element, and therefore a negotiating process using mainstream jargon and academic rituals.

> We do it in a way that they can understand. In terms of the philosophic aspect of semantics they have no problem with our [courses]; we have no problem with theirs.(Faculty member, 1991)

Effect on Indian Control of Tribal Colleges

Funding and legitimacy dependencies have different effects upon organizational structure. Findings at Turtle Mountain and Crow tribal colleges supported prior research findings that funding suppliers influence administrative structure. The colleges adopted various administrative features that were clearly linked to the receipt of particular kinds of funding. One site moved toward a more bureaucratized management system over time, apparently as a consequence of funding dependencies. Also, the second site reported pressure to do so also. In addition, bridging activities to regulate funding expanded to fill a considerable portion of the administrators' roles at both institutions. In support of Tolbert's finding that secondary sources of funding create more specific structures, respondents reported federal funds as providing basic support for the organization, but other funds as being targeted to special projects--with clearly delimited structure. Nevertheless, over time particular funding dependencies' effect on the colleges' administrative structure continued to loom large. However, academic

legitimacy needs played a decreasing role in administrative structure over time. Initially, the professional credentials of organizing administrators were crucial to influencing initial legitimacy of the organization. Both colleges employed professionally credentialled American Indians to form the critical nucleus for both local and external legitimacy. As the colleges gained institutional legitimacy, however, the organizational administrators' external roles as professionals became less salient than the bureaucratic structures they had put in place.

The case findings for academic structuring trends were the opposite of those for administration. Initially, academic processes were highly informal, providing ample opportunity for faculty to be innovative and flexible without jeopardizing the legitimacy of their services. At both sites, faculty with bachelors' degrees sufficed for many courses initially. Funding was critical. Courses and curricula were offered if targeted funding for them was available; and dropped if funding ceased. Over time, however, the colleges began to offer a stable core of courses and adopt an increasing amount of legitimated academic practices similar to those of mainstream institutions. Quantity of funding became less predictive of the courses offered over time. Rather, external legitimacy became more important. Whether particular mainstream four-year colleges offered comparable curricula at the lower

division level (and thus might be willing to accept students as transfers) exerted more influence upon decisions to offer courses or curricula. Transfer institutions' expectations that courses be taught by individuals with at least a Masters degree became important. Similarly, job availability for graduates of vocational training programs influenced training sequences rather than instructor preferences. Both sites confirmed that external professionals' expectations also influenced other formal academic structures at the tribal colleges. Even inclusion of Indian cultural content in courses was justified under the norm of "academic freedom"--a norm emanating from mainstream academia.

However, overall, despite the adoption of formal structures, the day to day practices at both colleges continued to reflect the social patterns of Indian rather than mainstream society. The struggle for control of their own institutions continues to loom large for American Indians in tribal colleges.

> Right now, our experience has been subjugation, approval or disapproval by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And, no, we don't have total control. We have to be accredited by an outside agency. We have to be funded by an outside government...I can offer you a quote, from the book White Man's Indian, written by Robert Brickofer. In a prayer for this General Sheridan he says, "To the white Americans all through this time the only good Indian was indeed a dead Indian whether through warfare or assimilation." [Fighting assimilation], that's what we are trying to attend to here. We don't want to be'dead Indians.' Essentially we are at war.(Faculty member, 1991)

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